

ATTACHMENT 4.12

Innovation and Expansion

Attachment 4.12 (d) Current Fiscal Year Innovation and Expansion Efforts

The USOR reserves and uses a portion of the funds allotted to the state under Section 110 of the Act for innovation and expansion efforts. The following innovation and expansion efforts will be funded during FY 08:

- (1) **SILC Funding:** In compliance with the Rehabilitation Act as amended, USOR will provide funds to the Utah State Independent Living Council to support innovation and expansion efforts consistent with the plan prepared under section 705(e)(1).
- (2) **USOR Computer Programmer:** In order to innovate and expand USOR's electronic case file and data management system, USOR has utilized funds to hire its first full time computer programmer with specific responsibilities of improving the functionality of this case service tool, adding new and innovative functions, and completing data share expansions.
- (3) **Web Site Expansion/ Utah Clicks:** USOR will utilize innovation and expansion monies to improve web site capabilities consistent with goals specified in attachment 4.11. Further, USOR will begin participation in the Utah Clicks program, a web based service that allows consumers to obtain information and referral to public services base on an advanced screening tool, and that allows for direct application for services.
- (4) **Data Share Development and Expansion:** The sharing of data information with our WIA Partner, the Department of Workforce Services (DWS) has developed through a Data Share Memorandum of Understanding between USOR and DWS. The data share has taken place in stages. In the first phase USOR began receiving social security benefit types and amounts electronically. This information is distributed automatically to the counselors through an electronic messaging system, which is caseload specific. Second, USOR has been able to obtain wage data employment information for VR clients who work for Utah employers that have reported their employment data during the previous quarter. Phase three expands the data share to include counselor contact information by sharing, with the partner agency, counselor names and phone numbers for joint clients. Through the data share USOR is further developing the partnership with DWS, allowing for better coordination of services and facilitation of clients' return to work.
- (5) **Supply Side Specialist:** As the demand for qualified employees in the workplace becomes greater, the need to connect qualified workers with disabilities with employers is increasing. As a result, the position of program specialist, with the responsibility to form a supply side network has been created. This new position, has worked to coordinate and conduct focus groups to find out more about what employers, clients, and other agencies need to create a functional networks to assist individuals with disabilities in finding and retaining competitive employment. Based on this input, strands have been established to operate this

network, which are tied to national, regional, and local networks. One thread of the network is to coordinate and facilitate targeted job fairs and coordinate accommodations at all job fairs; therefore, allowing all individuals to participate and make connections with employers.

Another component of the system is working with various employer groups such as Wasatch Employment Network (WEN), Utah Chamber of Commerce, Utah Business Employer Team (UBET), and participating in the Governor's Committee for Employment of People with Disabilities. Another element is attending DWS Roundtables for various industries, facilitating business contacts, allowing business people to learn from each other, and providing opportunities to educate employers on hiring individuals with disabilities. On another level, Choose to Work, job placement service for people with disabilities, developed through a partnership between DWS and USOR, has established regional and statewide e-mail groups. These e-mail groups assist in promoting better communication within the regions and throughout the state, contributing to improved job placement for people with disabilities.

- (6) **On-line Internal Review Instrument:** For many years USOR has conducted internal random reviews of case files as part of an over all improvement philosophy to improve quality services for eligible individuals with disabilities. In the past, a hard copy review instrument was used. The agency has developed and is in the process of rolling out an electronic on-line review instrument and process for conducting these internal reviews by Supervisors, District Directors, and Administrative Staff. The agency has piloted the new review instrument and is currently in an expanded pilot. The goal of this system for the agency is to reduce the processing steps of making aggregate information available, significantly reducing the turnaround time in generating meaningful results, and for use in the continuous improvement process.
- (7) **IRIS Integrated Facilities Screen:** To provide counselors with up-to-date, useful data regarding approved facilities for providing Informed Choice, an improved facilities screen of the Integrated Rehabilitation Information System (IRIS) database used by the agency is being developed. Instead of multiple site searches for information, this modification provides a one site "user friendly" screen for information the counselor and client can use to make informed choices. From this screen links will be attached for easy access to other information such financial aid, placement rates, licensing, etc. Additionally, instead of showing only VR approved costs for facilities, the site will show total program costs. Included with the development of this new facilities screen is the implementation of an automated facilities survey to obtain information from counselors working with clients to provide feedback on critical aspects of facilities performance. Results of these surveys will be continuously added to the data available on this screen for providing informed choice. These improvements will allow for quicker, single site access to the information needed to serve clients, improves timeliness of critical data being available at the site, and eliminates certain information which was considered to be irrelevant or not needed in the counseling process.
- (8) **Memorandum of Understanding to Support Employment (MOUSE) Committee:** The Memorandum of Understanding in Support of Employment (MOUSE) Committee has

continued to work toward improved partnership and collaboration between the USOR and the Department of Workforce Services (DWS) (Utah's DOL agency) throughout the state. The MOUSE Committee addresses 5 critical partnership areas; Pathways, Cross Training, Information Sharing, Employer Relations, and Accessibility. Under a steering committee, each of these areas has a committee with co-chairs, one each from DWS and USOR. Accomplishments to date of the sub-committees include the following:

Pathways: The Pathways Committee has developed materials and pathways that can be used throughout the state. They have developed a system for referring clients from one agency to another by using a liaison in each office including referral process and liaison responsibilities. In addition, they have developed a sheet of information and ideas to encourage quarterly regional partnership meetings between USOR and DWS Offices state wide.

Cross Training: Fostering the partnership between DWS and USOR by educating supervisors and staff about the services available through the partner agency and cultivating collaboration to work toward employment outcomes for common clients.

Employer Relations: The Employer Relations Committee works with the Governor's Committee for Employment of People with Disabilities to support and perpetuate the Utah Business Employer Team (UBET) throughout the state. They have assisted in launching a Governor's Committee website with links from agency websites. They are maintaining and sustaining Disability Mentoring Day, by working toward continuous mentoring between business mentors and individuals with disabilities which culminates in a year mentoring day once a year.

Physical and Program Accessibility: Facilities specialists on the committee are developing a joint DWS/USOR procedure for monitoring and evaluating training providers for approval. They continue to review agency applications, websites, and brochures for readability and accessibility for individuals with sensory impairments. Additionally, they review of many WIA partner programs for physical and programmatic accessibility.

Information Sharing: The Information Sharing Committee has identified data elements from DWS and USOR systems needed for information sharing. Determining that direct linkage batch records are the preferred method of sharing data, they have written specifications for development of extract files for both DWS and USOR and have developed screens in each system to view shared information. They are an integral part of the Data Share Development and Expansion. The MOUSE Committee and its sub-committees are essential to the partnership between USOR and DWS.

Attachment 4.12 (e) (2) FY2007 Innovation and Expansion Initiatives

During the previous fiscal year USOR utilized funds earmarked for innovation and expansion for the following activities:

- (1) Expansion of Benefits Planning and Outreach:** The purpose of benefits planning is to give Social Security recipients an in-depth understanding of their benefits and the impact employment will have on those benefits. The Utah Benefits Planning Assistance and Outreach (UBPAO) project disseminates accurate information to beneficiaries with disabilities including transition to work youth. Benefits Specialists provide five categories of service, including information and referral, problem solving and advocacy, benefits analysis, benefits support planning, and long term benefits management. These services are available statewide and are offered to all SSI/SSDI beneficiaries/recipients at no charge. While USOR has always funded benefit planners, the program has recently significantly expanded the number of benefit planners available. A grant through Social Security has added one new benefits specialist. Additionally, Utah has been selected as one of four states to participate in the SSDI 1 for 2 Benefit Offset Pilot demonstration project. With this project two additional benefits planners have been added. The project is designed to create and sustain a comprehensive, consumer-centered system of employment supports for people with significant disabilities in Utah. The UBPAO project works in partnership with this pilot in an effort to provide services to SSDI beneficiaries. The SSA Benefits Specialist will identify SSDI participants who have already been provided a benefit summary and provide them with updated information about work incentives and an in-depth benefits analysis services to increase informed choice for SSDI / SSI beneficiaries statewide
- (2) Supported Employment Rejuvenation Effort;** In an effort to increase the lagging number of eligible individuals in Supported Employment (SE) services as a result of lacking long term funding availability, USOR and the Utah State Division of Services to People with Disabilities (DSPD) jointly proposed a pilot project to the Utah State Legislature in January 2006. The proposal was funding for a two year effort to place 100 individuals (50 per year for two years) into SE in order to reduce the waiting list for long term funding, and to achieve employment outcomes for those individuals. This proposal, HB 31 passed through the legislature and was signed by the Governor, with funding effective July 1, 2006. The legislature approved funding for the second year for FY 2008. These efforts are ongoing, and results and outcomes will be reported following the end of FY 2007 on September 30, 2007.
- (3) Revised Basic Counselor Orientation Training (BCOT);** Operating several years now, BCOT was modified again this past year in a slight expansion of time given to this activity. Rather than a one week (5 day) orientation training, BCOT is now completed in two sessions of 3 days each, separated by a two week time frame. This modified presentation provides an additional day for training, and allows for time between sessions for counselors to practice and bring back questions to the second session.
- (4) Recruitment and Retention; Rehabilitation Counselor Performance Incentives** During FY 2006, incentives were implemented for counselors who achieve above average number of quality successful closures at the end of the fiscal year, and for successful closure of SSA cases that resulted in cost reimbursement. Once all cases were closed for the year, a review

team visited each district and reviewed a random selection of closed cases for quality compliance according to a predetermined quality checklist. In order to receive an incentive, cases being considered must meet quality assurance guidelines.

- (5) **USOR Leadership Development:** Began in October 2005, a long term training initiative to develop leadership skills at all levels of the agency, both for effective leadership within the agency structure as well as provision of effective leadership by USOR in the communities in which it is a partner, the leadership development training continues to benefit USOR. Conducted bi-monthly in conjunction with administrative staff meetings, the training is meant to give staff members the skills to participate in responsive leadership with the purposes of maintaining high morale, holding to agency vision and values, to excite continuous improvement, and meet the mission of the vocational rehabilitation program. The model is as follows: Training leaders provide training modules in a monthly administrative staff meeting. Thereafter, the administrators/mid-level leaders in attendance take the information to their various units and complete the same exercise. These unit members then provide feedback to the VR leaders, and that feedback is brought back to the larger monthly group for inclusion in the next session of leadership training. Through this process, effective two-way communication is established and agency values, vision and continuous improvement efforts move forward with all staff having buy-in.